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ABSTRACT

Prior to the implementation of a career education program, a career aspirations survey was conducted in one New Mexican community. The sample population included first and second generation Mexican-American secondary school students. A six-item questionnaire was administered to 720 students from one junior and one senior high school. The results were categorized according to 15 occupational clusters. A composite of all six grade levels showed the most desired careers seem to be in the areas of health, business and office, public service, environment, and communications and media. Upper grade students were more specific about careers. The largest number of students undecided about a career are in the 12th grade and the smallest in the 7th grade. It appears that a large portion of the student population is not prepared to step into a career at graduation. In this community of relatively low economic status, the apparent need for a practical, realistic career education program is evident. Tables display the distribution of desired careers according to grade level, and the six-item questionnaire is appended. (Author/NJ)

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A Survey of Career Aspirations for Secondary School Students

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VT-102-318

Problem:

What are the career aspirations of secondary school students from a specific Southwestern community at various grade levels prior to implementing a career education program in that specific school system.

Procedure:

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the director of instruction of the public school system utilized. His consent was predicted upon the subsequent approval of the principals of the two secondary schools involved in the study who then graciously allowed the study to be administered in their respective schools. The one school was a junior high school whose students subsequently advanced into the other school, a senior high school. In conferences with the two principals, a concerted effort between the principal and the investigator was coordinated to select the three social studies faculty members on each of their respective staffs who appeared to have the most respect and the best rapport with their students. These six carefully selected faculty members graciously accepted the responsibility of administering the questionnaire to their respective students.

Students Involved:

Seven hundred twenty (720) students were randomly selected from the classes of these selected faculty members. One hundred twenty (120) from each grade level from each school, or a sampling of three hundred sixty (360) from each school. The one junior high school (grades seven, eight, and nine) and the one senior high school (grades ten, eleven, and twelve)

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were fairly well distributed between the twelve to nineteen year old age bracket and almost equal balance of the sexes, a wide range of socio-economic status was consciously adhered to within the sample group of students. This 720 sample groups of students was selected from an estimated 2,765 secondary public school population from both schools (1,655 in the senior high school; 1,110 in the junior high school).

Questionnaire:

The wording on the questionnaire was simple and direct (see Appendix A). The introductory remarks by the selected faculty members in the administering of the questionnaire were the same throughout, and the answering of the questionnaire and motivational comments by these same faculty members were very positive. Special emphasis should be noted, however, that according to the faculty members administering the questionnaire, the youth appeared to fill-out the questionnaire honestly and sincerely without any semblance on the students' part to be flippant or threatened by it and consequently were not remiss in the legitimacy of their responses. No student signatures were required on the questionnaire, and the students themselves turned in their questionnaire all together upon the completion of the exercise.

Results:

The results of the questionnaire were categorized according to the fifteen occupational clusters found in the government pamphlet, Career Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; Office of Education, DHEW Publisher No. (OE) 72-39, Washington, D. C.; U. S. Government Printing Office, 1971, 10 pp.

VT 102318

The clusters are:

Fine Arts and Humanities
Transportation
Construction
Health
Environment
Manufacturing
Marine Science
Personal Services
Public Services
Hospitality and Recreation
Consumer and Homemaking Education
Communication and Media
Marketing and Distribution
Business and Office
Agricultural Business and Natural Resources

One other category was included:

Unknown

If a student designated unknown or unemployed on his/her questionnaire the choice was religated to his category. The percentage of questionnaires in each occupational cluster to the sample population of 120 per grade was then counted for each grade in each school; 7, 8, and 9 in the junior high school, and 10, 11, and 12 in the senior high school.

The 1-2-3 rank of desired occupational choices in the grades are:

7th - Hospitality and Recreation (19.2%)
Health (15.8%)
Public Services & Business and Office tied @ 10.8%

8th - Health (17.5%)
Public Services (13.3%)
Unknown (12.5%)

9th - Business and Office (19.2%)
Health (12.5%)
Transportation (10.8%)

10th - Business and Office (20%)
Health (17.5%)
Unknown (11.6%)

11th - Public Services (15.7%)
Fine Arts and Humanities (14.3%)
Business and Office (11.4%)

12th - Health and Business tied @ 16.6%
Unknown (12.5%)

Conclusions and Recommendations:

A composite of all six grade levels shows the most desired careers seem to be in the areas of Health, Business and Office, Public Service, and Unknown and the least desired careers in the areas of Marine Science, Environment, and Communication and Media. Upper grade students seem to be more specific about careers with the lower grade students more general in their choices. Fine Arts, Home Economics and Agri-Business and Natural Resources seem to be the most stable choices in number throughout the grades. These variety of choices may be derived from the type of occupations available in this community.

The following questions need to be asked regarding this study:

(1) Why do the 8th, 10th, and 12th graders have a higher degree of uncertainty about a career than do the grades of 7th, 9th, and 11th?

(2) Why do students seem to consider manual labor jobs not a "career" since only a small percentage of these choices were recorded? Aren't these young people aware of these jobs? This rationale doesn't seem likely, and yet the survey showed this in all grade levels.

(3) Why do the lower grade students seem to be more idealistic than the students of higher grades, or rather why do the older students lose their idealism?

(4) Why are a large number of students desiring to be airplane stewardesses, lawyers, and policemen? Could these responses be the direct influence from television and the movies?

In the upper grades, especially the 12th, students seem to shift from the stewardess, lawyer, and policeman area to the business and office area considered to be the more practical and realistic for their future expectations.

The idealism in the Health field remained about the same from the 7th through the 12th grade; these choices were of the MD/Nurse variety. Students of this community apparently want to help each other survive, and yet it seems odd that careers in environment are one of the least desired career fields. It just might be that students do not know of any type of careers in this area.

On the humorous vein, students appeared to believe that there are only two careers in personal services: beauticians and morticians.

Oddly enough, the largest number of students undecided about a career are in the 12th grade and smallest in the 7th grade. Somewhere along the line they seem to become discouraged or frustrated. It is also unusual that the large number of students desiring to be "unemployed" and "live on welfare" are also in the upper grades.

As a final thought on the conclusion section, it appears that a large portion of the student population is not prepared to step into a career upon graduation from high school. This conclusion is based on:

a. the high number of students who have no idea of what they would like as a career, and

b. the low number of manual labor careers selected.

Reflections on the study's significance:

In this community of relatively low-economic status for the majority of the populace with the majority of the students either first or second generation of Mexican - Americans, the apparent need for a practical realistic career education program is evident. And yet the following statistic is so annoying. The college enrollment from the high school graduating classes for the past ten years is consistently over the 50% mark. Imagine, one out of two high school graduates continues on in college. Does this mean the college aspiration of the students is so high because a land-grant university is located in the same community? Or aren't there just any available jobs in this community for merely high school graduates?

Hopefully the instigation of the state approved career education program in the fall of 1974 will take the results from this study into account and adjust the goals and purposes for that program accordingly.

Hopefully, also, this type of study could be conducted annually dependent upon the career education program's expectations so as to determine whether the students career aspirations change or remain basically the same throughout the student's school tenure.

Appendix A

CAREER ASPIRATION SURVEY

UPON COMPLETION OF MY FORMAL SCHOOLING,

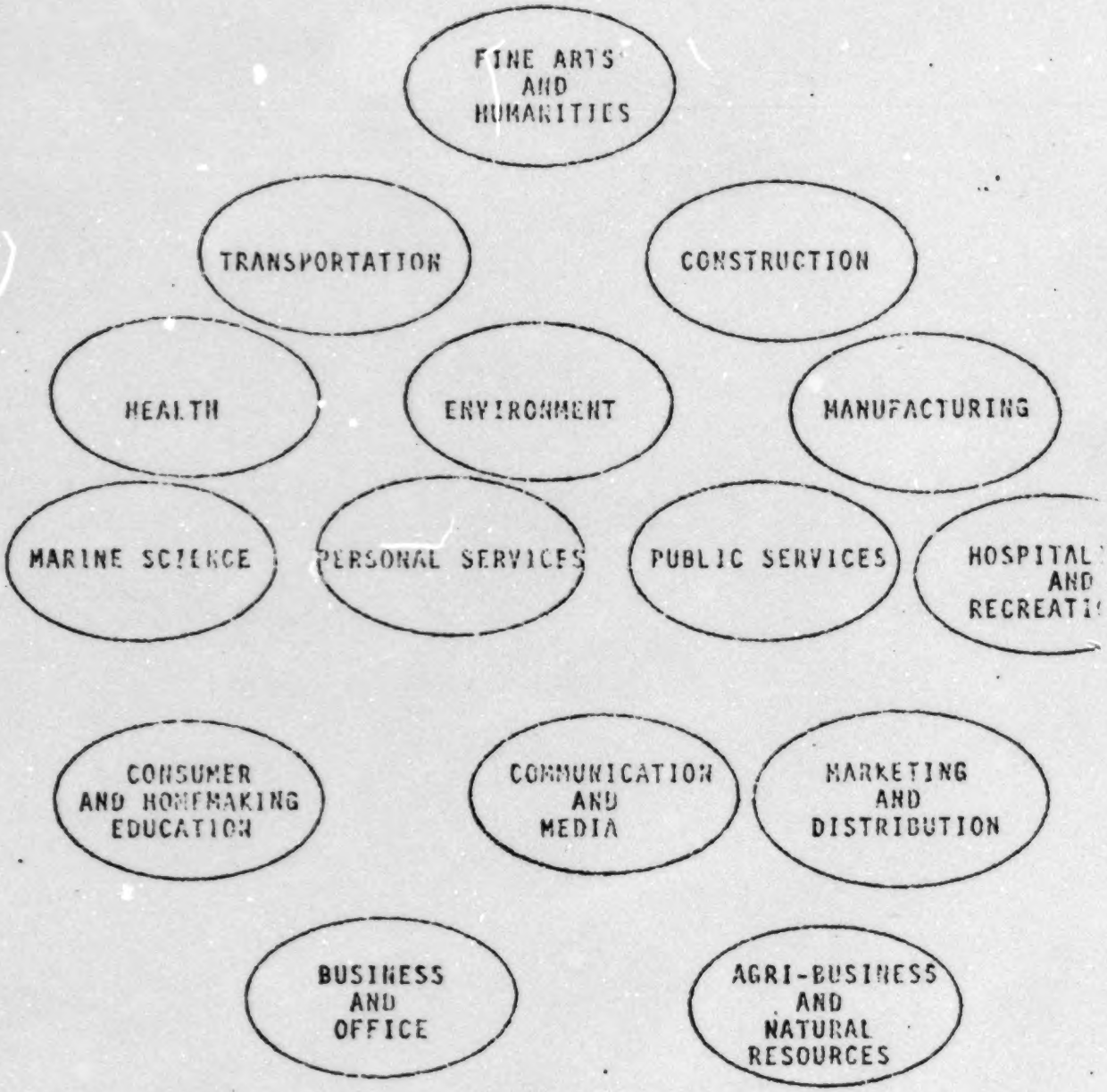
I WOULD DESIRE TO BECOME: (SELECT ONLY ONE)

SELF-EMPLOYED AS A _____

EMPLOYED AS A _____ BY _____

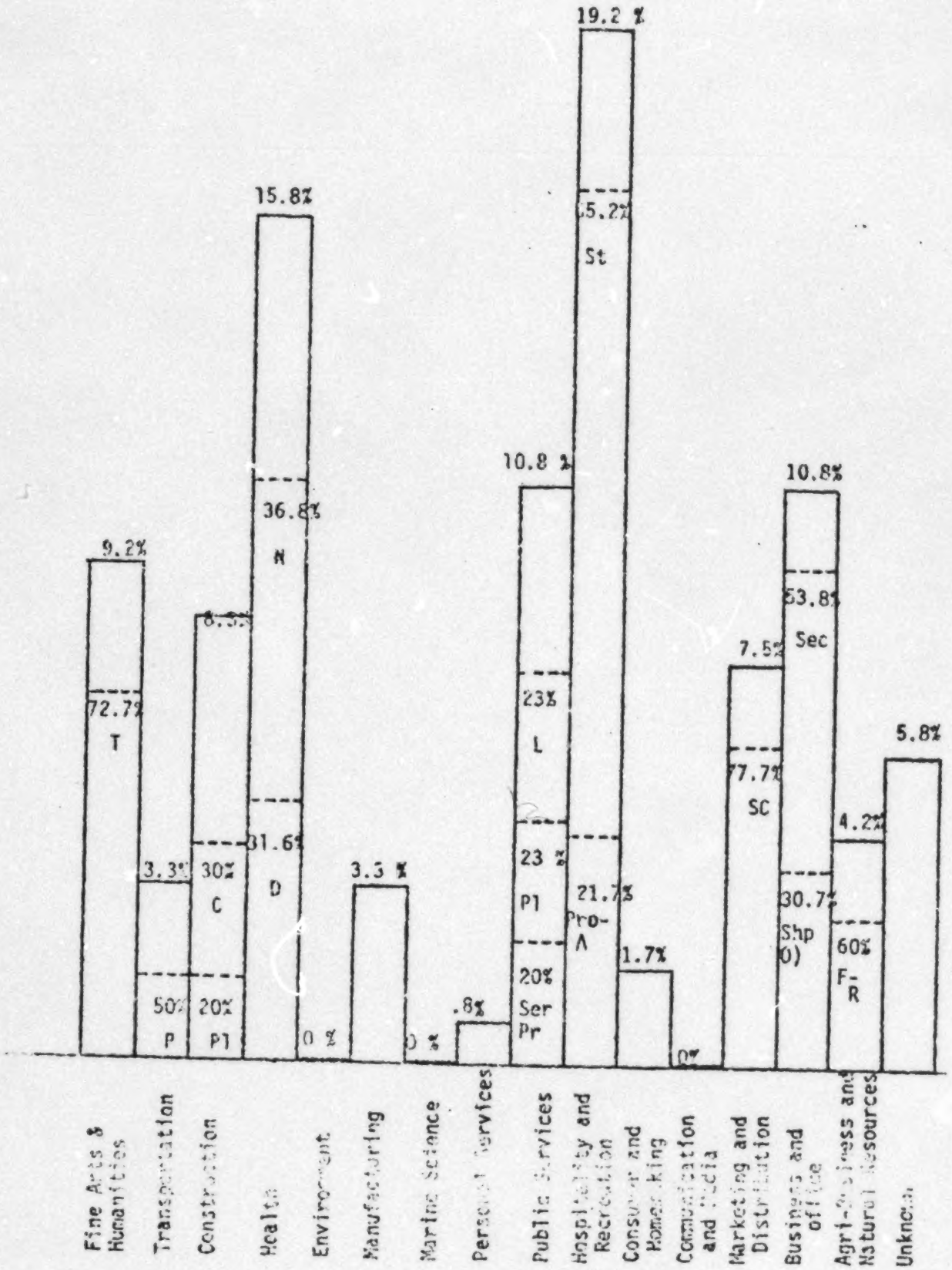
NON-EMPLOYED _____ OTHER _____

GRADE _____ SCHOOL _____

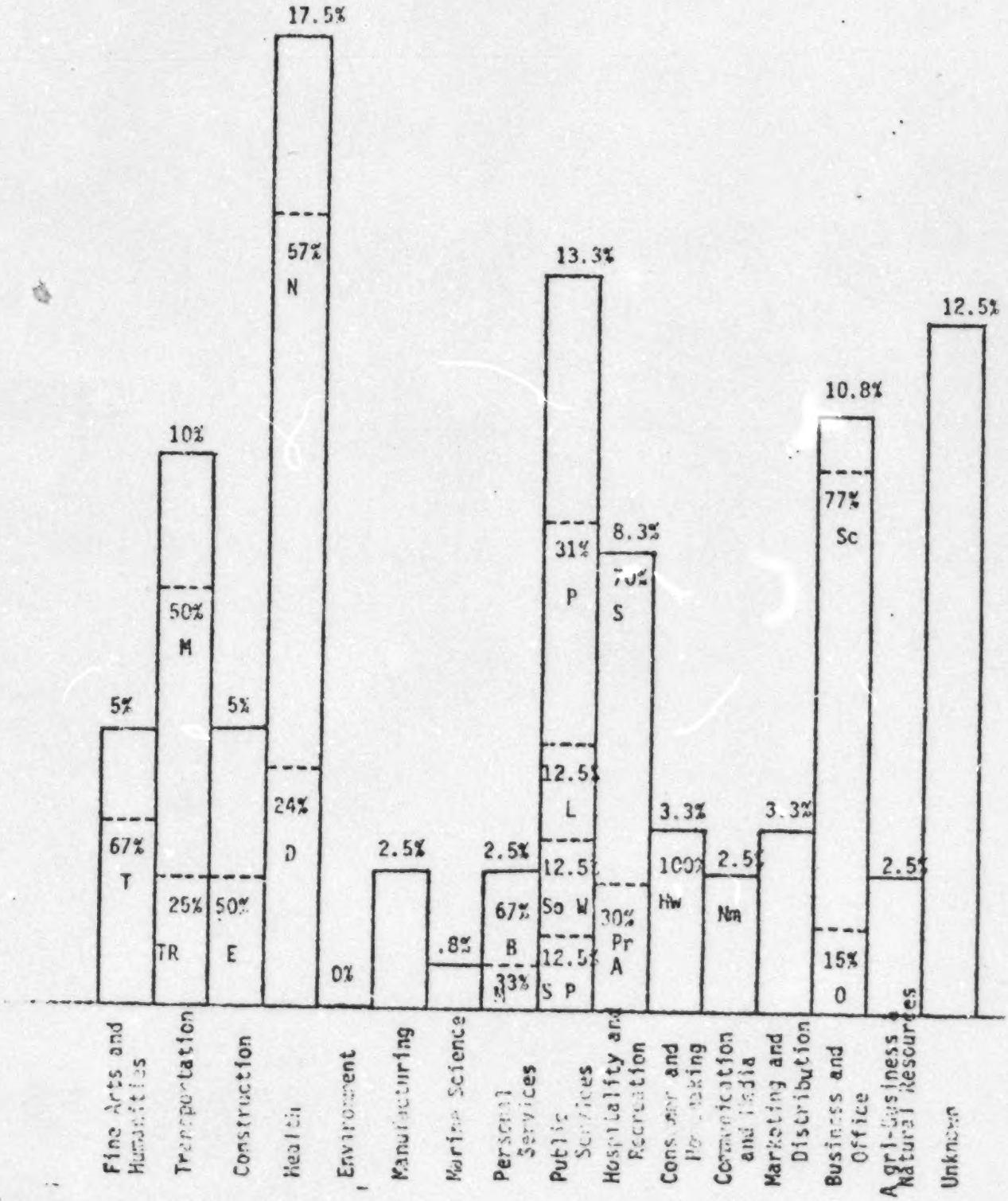


Occupational Clusters
(Career Education, 71)

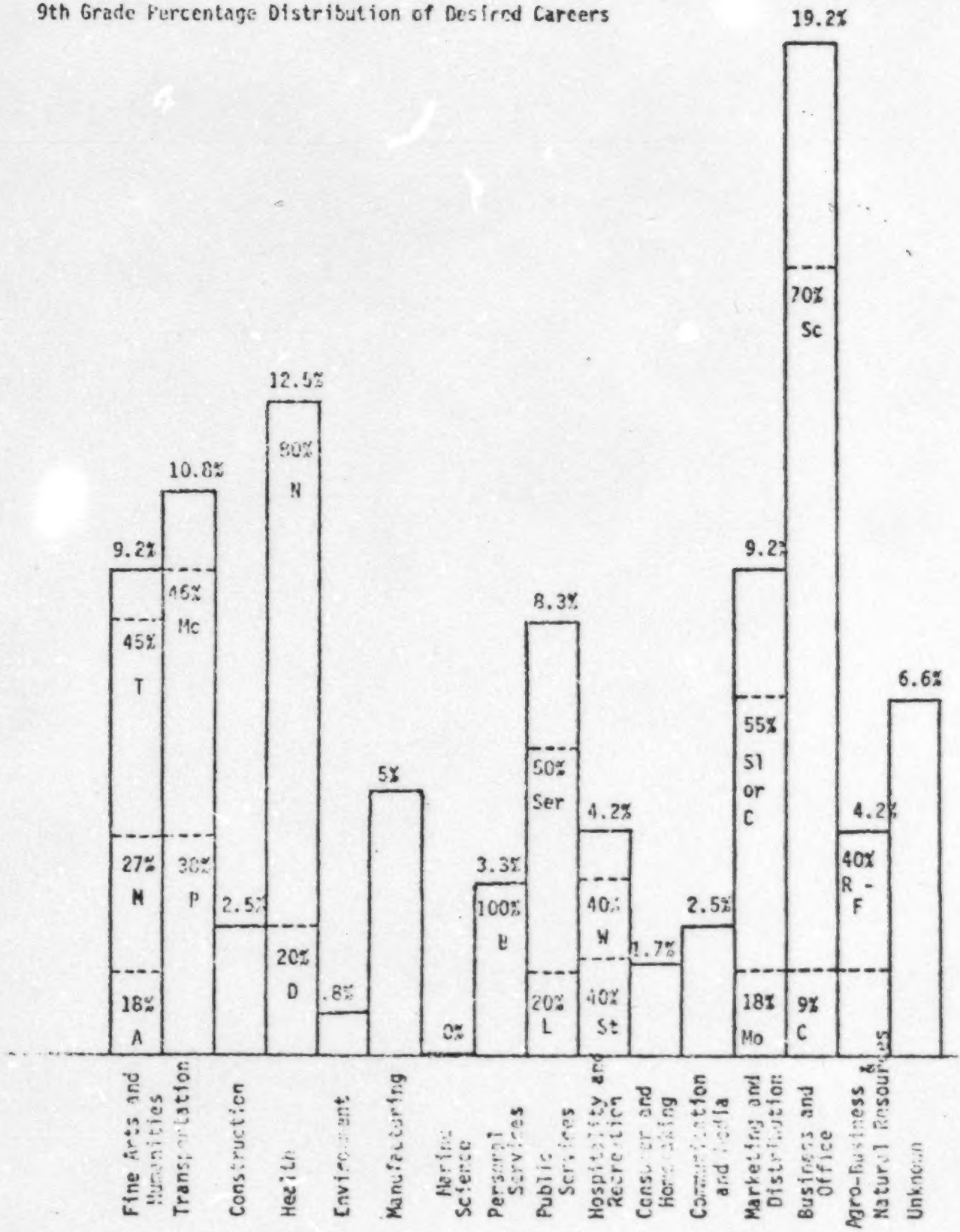
7th Grade Percentage Distribution of Desired Careers



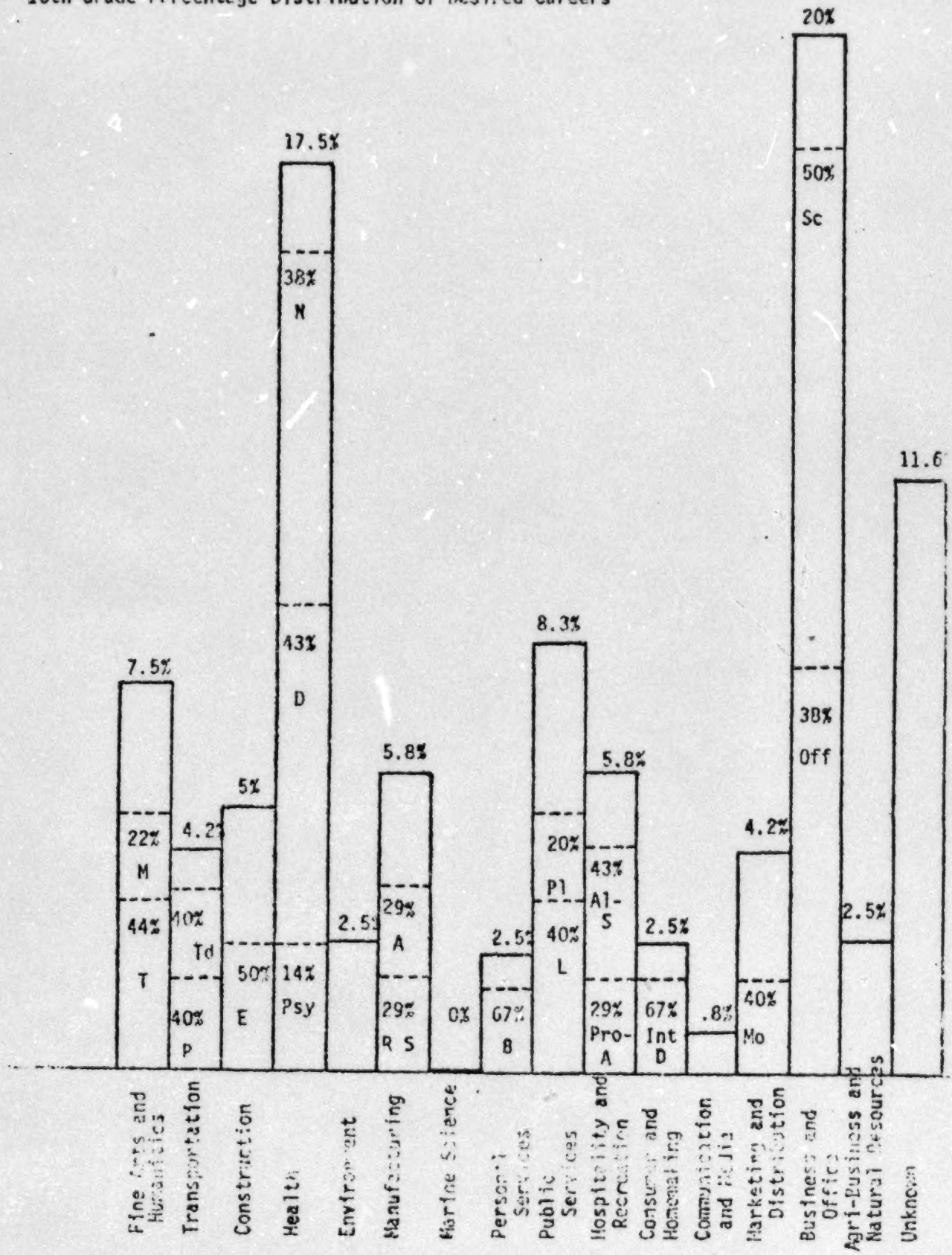
8th Grade Percentage Distribution of Desired Careers



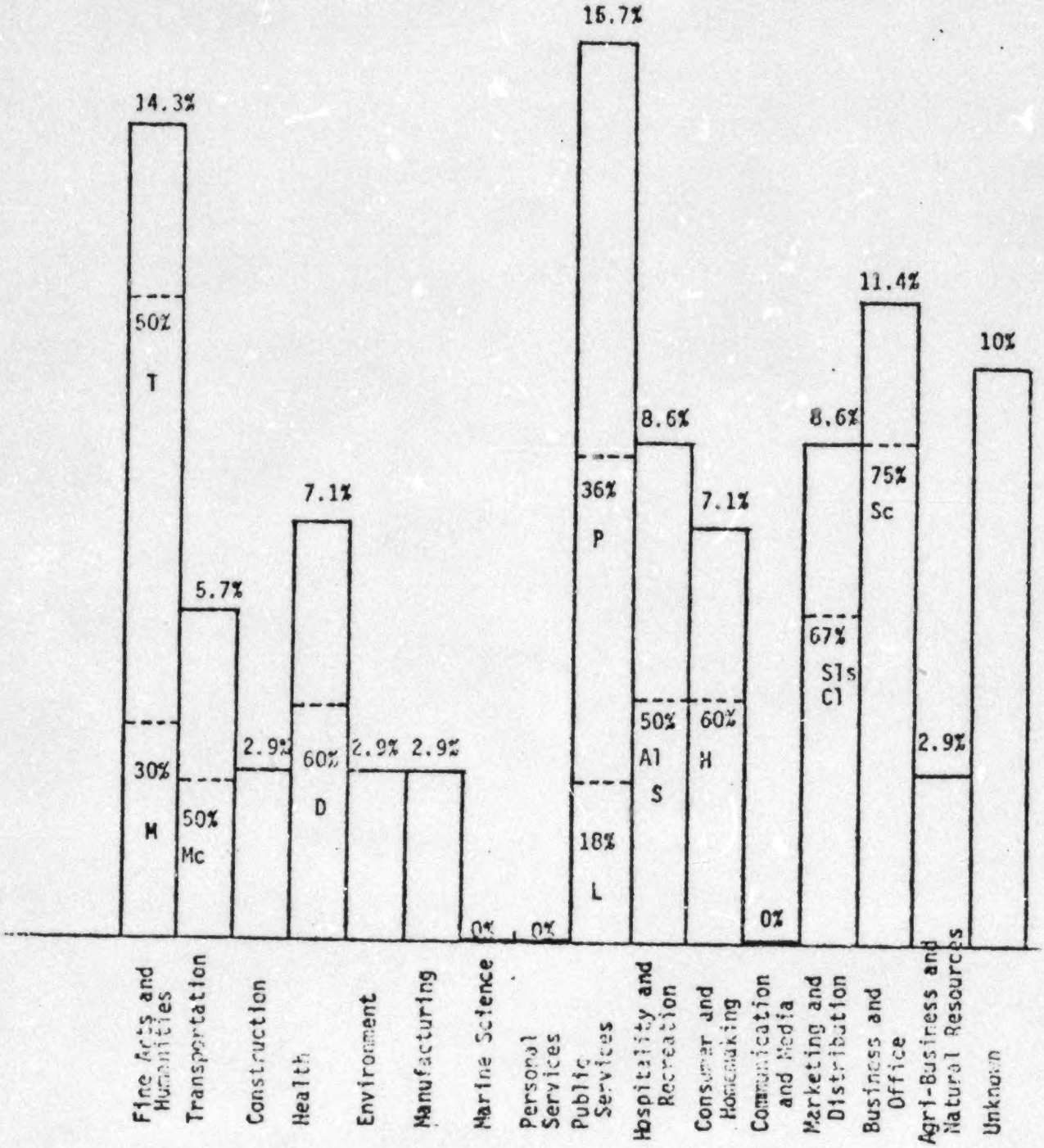
9th Grade Percentage Distribution of Desired Careers



10th Grade Percentage Distribution of Desired Careers



11th Grade Percentage Distribution of Desired Careers



12th Grade Percentage Distribution of Desired Careers